

# Inspiration Worth Quoting

By Nancy Colling

Through the Central Florida Women's League, **Jeanne Fortier** has both received and passed on a great deal of community inspiration.

**J**eanne Fortier of Windermere loves the inspiration she finds in quotes, often writing down her own musings when a spark of insight hits. A Walt Disney quote, one of Jeanne's favorites, emphasizes the importance of having a vision.

Although Fortier falls squarely in the "dreamer" category, having envisioned more than 20 years ago a charitable organization of women that would make a significant impact in the community, she is most definitely a "doer," too. The Central Florida Women's League (CFWL), an organization she helped found in 1988, recently passed the \$1 million milestone for contributions to a wide variety of charities that have improved the lives of countless Central Floridians.

"It speaks to the power of women together," says Fortier. "As one person, I can only do so much, but with many, it multiplies, and then we can truly make a difference."

With a kind, unfailingly gracious manner, the wife, mother and grandmother of six makes friends easily and enjoys an active social life. But make no mistake—her organizational abilities and executive skills would rival a Fortune 500 CEO. And she does it all with a smile.

The idea for CFWL started when Fortier and her husband **George** relocated to Windermere from Virginia in 1986.

As a recent empty nester and knowing no one in the area, Jeanne focused her attention on establishing roots in her new community, drawing on her extensive experience as a volunteer.

She immediately saw the need for a more organized way to increase the impact of local volunteers, so with an initial investment from her businessman husband—"my banker," laughs Jeanne—the nine founding members of the CFWL each invited 10 women to a recruiting tea. Ninety percent of the attendees joined.

As the first CFWL president, Jeanne carefully structured the organization to ensure that each member had a purpose, requiring everyone to actively assume committee responsibilities and attend meetings. Membership, by sponsorship only, was kept to approximately 120 women. The limited numbers increased accountability and dedication among members, making their projects and fundraising efforts more successful. Even better, the women developed strong friendships.

"The camaraderie is so important to us," says Jeanne. "We are a cross-section of women—bankers, builders, attorneys, moms—who might never have met one another without the league."

Over the years, the league's creative fundraisers have included golf tourna-



When she first moved to Windermere, Jeanne Fortier used her organizational abilities and executive skills to help found the Central Florida Women's League.

ments, galas, wine tastings and the ever popular upscale garage sale. Charities that receive monies from the league are carefully screened to ensure that funds make the most impact. Hospice of Central Florida, The Russell Home and Alzheimer's Respite Care have all been previous recipients.

The league's foundation also established a scholarship program that has awarded more than \$150,000 in the past nine years to deserving high school students. The award closest to Jeanne's heart, however, is the George Fortier Scholarship, a separate award she established to honor her husband after his passing four years ago. "He was a wonderful man and very generous," says Jeanne. "I'd like to think he would be proud of it."

Although still very active in the league, she is pleased to see the involvement and contributions of new members over the years, many of whom have become close friends. With a full schedule filling up each day, Jeanne sums up her approach to life with another of her favorite quotes: life is a gift—live it, enjoy it, fulfill it. ■

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